Mapping Potential Territories: The Kings Arms Tavern



Photograph by Jonathan Kedward

The Kings Arms Tavern is situated on Swansea High Street, with King's Street (which is more of an alley) on its right. I can remember being told by my god-father who is massively interested in listed buildings and local history that it was the oldest running pub in Swansea until it shut down. Of course there are pubs in older buildings, such as the Cross Keys, however they hadn't been used as pubs for as long.

To get a sense of what the pub was like prior to its closure I had a look on Tripadvisor to see what people had written about the place. Most of the reviews were very negative - I have included one review below (I liked how it is almost structured like a poem):

"This bar is disgusting!!
Rude staff and managers.
Bouncer looks like she chewed a wasp.
Not a clue how to run a nice gay bar
The whole place stinks ,dirty floors furniture.
Expensive for drinks
Really not worth the money
Better off going to wine street

Better atmosphere there .
What a shame there is not another nicer gay venue in Swansea!!
Avoid this dirty disgusting place !!!!
Close it down !!!”

In terms of accessibility, I am trying to get in contact with the commercial developer Coastal Housing, who have recently purchased the property. On their website they mention plans to “upgrade” the building and then re-open it for commercial use. I’m assuming that means they will open it again as some sort of bar or pub. After peeking through the windows- you can see that the inside of the building is in quite a state. This means that, provided we have permission from Coastal Housing, there would be a big clean-up job involved before displaying any work there.

- I have spoken to Coastal Housing over the phone and explained the project, the fact we would need access to the site etc. - the message has been passed on to the management team, so they should be getting back to me in the next few days.

When considering themes for a project here, there are quite a few directions you could take it in (death of the high street, inflation, changing attitudes in young people towards alcohol, you could explore the site from an LGBTQ perspective). This would depend on the group - maybe we would pick one theme and work on it together or we could each make slightly different work and have a small group exhibition inside the pub.
An idea that came to my mind was representing “ghosts of the past.” I find there is a really stark contrast looking at a space which you know has had many busy nights, then to see it still and silent. I used to have this feeling working in pubs after all the customers left on friday and saturday nights. My ears would still be ringing slightly from all the noise and chatter from 10 minutes ago and I’m wiping down the bar in near silence.
I thought a good way to represent this idea would be to cover all the tables and bar surface in paper covered in cyanotypes of glass bottoms. In my head, this looks similar to beer stains where people haven’t used coasters.
Another idea I had was to find as many archival photographs of this pub as possible, then to reshoot the found images on film, then experiment with developing the film in different kinds of alcohol. Here in this link somebody has created a “beer developer”

- https://shootitwithfilm.com/how-to-develop-film-in-beer/

Photos of the Site:


THE KINGS ARMS TAVERN


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